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2. GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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INTRODUCTION

- *Equality between women and men is one of the fundamental principles of the European Union.*
- *The European Union pursues a three-pronged strategy towards gender equality, combining legislation, positive actions and gender mainstreaming.*

Equality between women and men is one of the fundamental principles of the European Union, as expressed in European Community law and in rulings by the European Court of Justice. It is enshrined in Article 119 (now 141 EC) of the Treaty of Rome (1957) on equal pay for equal work or work of equal value. In order to make gender equality a reality, the European Union pursues a three-pronged strategy, combining legislation, positive actions and gender mainstreaming.

The concept of gender mainstreaming appeared in European Commission documents for the first time in 1989, in a working paper by Helle Jacobsen, a Danish expert on equal opportunities. It was included in the Third Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities between Women and Men 1991–1995. It was intended to tackle the structural causes of inequality, but the concept was poorly understood and few actions were undertaken to implement it until, following the Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing, it was adopted as a strategy by the European Commission in 1996². In the Treaty of Amsterdam, which entered into force in 1999, gender mainstreaming obtained a legal basis, being included in Articles 2 and 3 (2) EC as the commitment to eliminating inequalities and promoting equality between women and men in all Community activities.

² European Commission, *Incorporating equal opportunities for women and men into all Community policies and activities*. Communication from the Commission COM (96) 67 final, 1996.

Institutionally, the Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities is in charge of gender equality policies. Within the Directorate-General for Social Affairs, Employment and Equal Opportunities, Directorate G (Equal Opportunities), Unit G/1 (Equal Opportunities for Women and Men: Strategy and Programme) is in charge of the overall coordination of gender mainstreaming. The unit is assisted in its work by an advisory committee, a programme committee, a high-level group of senior member state officials, and a Commission interservices group. The Women's Rights Committee of the European Parliament and the European Women's Lobby also play an active role in monitoring.

The practical implications of gender mainstreaming are elaborated in the Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality (2001–05, to be renewed in 2006) which is an umbrella for all activities of the European Commission's services and which coordinates their efforts to 'combat inequalities between the sexes in economic, political, civil and social life, and to change roles and remove stereotypes in this area'. It involves policy analysis and planning, the collection of sex-disaggregated data, and the training and awareness-raising of key actors. The strategy is supported by a financial programme for 2001–2005 of €50 million. A Community Action Programme accompanies this global strategy. Since 1999, gender mainstreaming has been a requirement of the Structural Funds regulations³. In addition, gender mainstreaming is a requirement of the Employment Guidelines, which seek to coordinate the approaches of member states to employment and training issues. The European Employment Strategy (EES) was developed in 1997 and revised in 2003. Its objectives are translated into guidelines, which have been mainstreamed and include gender-sensitive objectives⁴.

REVIEWS OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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³ European Commission, *Implementation of gender mainstreaming in the Structural Funds programming documents 2000–2006*. Communication from the Commission. COM (2002) 748 final.

⁴ Council Decision of 12 July 2005 on Guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States, 2005/600/EC, OJ L 205/21–27, 6.8.2005.

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- FINDINGS OF THE REVIEWS**
- General observations**
- Gender mainstreaming is understood very differently across Member States
 - Real implementation is still lacking.
 - The suite of indicators to monitor progress on gender equality is incomplete.
- The academic reviews of gender mainstreaming all come to similar conclusions (Verloo, 2006). Understanding and adaptation of the concept of gender mainstreaming vary widely in the EU Member States, ranging from the equation of the concept with equal opportunities and equality to its being understood as embracing affirmative action, equal treatment, equal participation, and reform of government. At the level of implementation, most policies implemented in the Member States are simply a continuation of previous policies (Behning and Serrano Pascual, 2001; Stratigaki, 2004). There are different 'gender equality frameworks' and different and sometimes competing ideas about what the problem is, who is responsible for it, what the causes and effects are, and what a solution would be. In particular, Ulrike Liebert (2002) explores the conditions for empowering gender mainstreaming as a new policy framework in the member states, the patterns and dynamics of mainstreaming

implementation in different EU Member States; which mechanisms have done most to ensure effective cross-border diffusion of good mainstreaming practices in the face of diverging gender regimes.

The Luxembourg Presidency stated in its report (Theisen et al., 2005) that the 1998 EU pledge to develop a simple suite of indicators to monitor progress on the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) is as yet unfulfilled, and that there are serious challenges to the development of the indicators and statistical data necessary to monitor the effectiveness of policy developments relevant to the BPfA. The development of indicators has progressed furthest in areas associated with the economy, though even here there are major gaps, especially in relation to the adequacy of the data. In several areas, there are no agreed indicators. The report identifies several specific needs:

- to develop an indicator on **poverty** and collect data that would capture resource distribution within as well as between households;
- to agree on relevant and available indicators on **education** for the purposes of gender equality, not limited to the European Employment Strategy alone;
- to collect data on the **gender pay gap** that is fully comparable, inclusive and annual;
- to provide statistics to support the Presidency's indicators on the **provision of care** for children and other dependants, relevant to the Barcelona targets.

Braithwaite (2000 and 2003) comes to similar conclusions, focusing on the Structural Funds. One of the general risks of the gender mainstreaming approach is that it does not set precise objectives for reducing gender inequalities. As a result, the treatment of gender can easily be absorbed by other policy goals, such as employment creation, economic growth or poverty reduction. To date, Braithwaite says, the main gender equality objective of the Structural Funds is to improve female

participation in the labour market. Reconciliation of home and professional life is then treated as a means to facilitate women's more active participation in the labour market, rather than as an equality objective in its own right. Contrary to the rhetoric of gender mainstreaming, in the practices analysed by Braithwaite, efficiency and effectiveness, rather than equity, serve as convincing arguments for integrating equality concerns into Structural Funds programmes.

The mainstreaming strategy in the Structural Funds has led to contrasting results. It has had positive results insofar as increasing emphasis was put on gender equality in projects cofunded by the Member States and the Community, especially those supported by the European Social Fund in the field of education and vocational training. On the negative side, the mainstreaming strategy in the Structural Funds has led to the replacement of the women-only NOW initiative by EQUAL (www.ec.europa.eu/equal), which covers all social groups. Gender mainstreaming has not supplemented but replaced positive action in favour of women (Advisory Committee, 2002, p. 4). Therefore it is recommended that monitoring of spending be reinforced in order to avoid the shift of gender-centred funding towards other objectives and structural priorities (p. 5), and that Member States assess *ex ante* the impact on women and men of all policies, measures and actions financed by the Structural Funds (European Commission, 2004, p. 11). After 2006, Structural Funds policies will be refocused in order to contribute more to Lisbon objectives such as higher employment and an inclusive society, but the latter concept has been 'translated' as removing discrimination and paying special regard to 'vulnerable' groups such as people with special educational needs, without addressing the issue of gender equality (Braithwaite, 2003).

The Commission has produced a guide to gender mainstreaming in policy design for all those involved in the national EQUAL programmes⁵, and an overview of projects

⁵ EQUAL Guide on Gender Mainstreaming (n.d.), at http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/data/document/gendermain_en.pdf

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developed in the framework of the EQUAL programme, offering examples of best practice in the fields of employability, entrepreneurship, adaptability and equal opportunities (European Commission, 2005b; see also ETG 4, 2005). Some of these projects aim to gender mainstream a policy. However, these practices predominantly target public authorities, and they are typically national projects: examples include the Danish project **Youth, gender and career**, which aims to make gender mainstreaming an integral part of the national system of educational and vocational guidance; the Austrian project **Just GEM**, which targets decision-makers who control labour market policies in a specific region; and the Dutch project **Bridging the gender gap at universities**. There is no analysis of the underlying factors for success or the potential replication of these projects.

Education

- *The EU has very limited competences in the field of education.*
- *Education is always addressed as linked to economical needs.*

EU efforts directed towards gender mainstreaming in education suffer from two key limitations. The first is the limited competences of the EU, and the second is the narrow scope for gender mainstreaming in the EU view of education, which focuses on the 'competitive and knowledge-based economy'. This has resulted in activities that are limited in both number and scope.

The EU has no treaty-based own competencies in the field of education and learning programmes. Responsibility for this domain belongs to the Member States (or in federal states, their regions). The EU acts only in a complementary way in certain domains, notably those related to the labour market and the Lisbon objectives ('the EU as a knowledge-based economy'). For instance, the Commission recommends that Member States eliminate

sex-stereotyped subject and curriculum choices from early school age onwards in order to avoid the transmission of educational sex segregation into the labour market (European Commission, 2004, p. 11). The EU has sponsored some equal opportunities initiatives in the Erasmus, Leonardo, Socrates and Youth programmes, but there has been no systematic approach. Rees (1998) assessed the programmes, and observes that the policy is not based upon a sound analysis of the gendered nature of education and vocational training and that, therefore, the initiatives remain isolated and fundamental flaws in education policies are not tackled. Gender equality objectives in EU education policy are limited to increasing female recruitment in scientific and technical studies and ensuring gender parity in tertiary and continuing training. The effectiveness of such measures for eliminating gender gaps is doubtful. Research shows that gender bias 'lies in the education system and its teaching practices, not in any inherent physical or intellectual barriers on the part of girls or women' (Braithwaite, 2003, p. 32). Mainstreaming gender equality into curriculum and assessment practices, classroom and school cultures and teacher education programmes would be a more promising strategy – but this falls predominantly under the exclusive competence of national authorities.

The field of research may be partially excepted from the above analysis. EU research policy is even mentioned often as a success story in gender mainstreaming, because of its comprehensive and integrated approach. In the framework of the Women and Science programme of DG Research, a comprehensive set of activities has been initiated, including the production and dissemination of an influential report on the situation of women in research⁶, the development of an internal monitoring system (Gender Watch System), the creation of a network of national experts (the Helsinki Group), the organisation of European conferences, and

⁶ ETAN, *Science policies in the European Union: Promoting excellence through mainstreaming gender equality*, European Technology Assessment Network on Women and Science for the European Commission, DG Research, 2000.

gender impact assessments of all research fields, including the 5th Framework Programme Research Project. Gender mainstreaming has also been adopted as an approach in the 6th Framework Programme. Nonetheless, the field of research also suffers from being restricted within the narrow scope of the 'knowledge-based economy'. The Commission frames gender mainstreaming as 'realising fully the potential of the European Research Area' and therefore recommends reinforcing mechanisms for involving women scientists more actively in scientific research and in the research policy process (European Commission, 2004, p. 11).

While the Presidencies and Councils have not agreed on an indicator for the education and training of women and girls in relation to the BPfA, there are three relevant structural indicators, which are reported annually to the Spring Council. These are:

- 'lifelong learning' (adult participation in education and training);
- 'science and technology graduates';
- 'the educational attainment of women and men'.

The data for these are adequate and available from ESTAT. A further issue, for which there is no proposed indicator, is that of the segregation of women into subject areas which tend to lead to less well-paid jobs. The challenge identified by the Luxembourg Presidency is to agree on relevant and available indicators for purposes of gender equality, not only the European Employment Strategy.

Employment

- *Reasonable data and indicators in the field of employment exist.*
- *The EES is limited because it does not address the structures that create gender inequality and because it is not empowering.*

The EU has a number of indicators that apply to gender equality in the economy. Corresponding to the gender pay gap,

which is a Structural Indicator, the 2003 Council recommended the target of a significant closing of the gender pay gap. While there are some reasonable data to support this, they are not fully comparable, inclusive, or annual. For example, some countries provide data for full-time workers only – even though the operational definition of the Structural Indicator includes those working more than 15 hours a week – thereby excluding a particularly low-paid set of women workers in some, but not all, countries. There is currently a gap in the main source of data collection, as the European Household Panel Survey (EHPS) is coming to an end and its replacement, the Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) survey, has not yet started. The EU has had indicators for the provision of care for children and other dependants since 2000, and the Barcelona Council in 2002 set hard targets, within the European Employment Strategy, on childcare, so that, by 2010, the Member States should be providing childcare places for at least 90% of children between 3 years and school age and at least 33% of children under 3. However, there is no Structural Indicator in this area, and annually collected, cross-nationally comparable data are currently lacking. Eurostat has announced plans to include questions about care in two future surveys (Eurostat, 2004). In the Labour Force Survey for 2005, an ad hoc module will contain a set of questions on how childcare and other care responsibilities are dealt with and will also ask about the take-up of parental leave. In a couple of years SILC will include questions on childcare.

Statistical information on two further topics relevant to gender equality in the economy, the gender gaps in employment and in unemployment, is managed by Eurostat, since these are Structural Indicators. Under the early version of the European Employment Strategy, these were both indicators of equal opportunities. There have been hard targets to narrow these gender gaps, qualified by age, since 2000. Gender equality has been successfully included in the European Employment Strategy as the fourth pillar of the Guidelines for the National Action Plans⁷.

⁷ OJ L 197/13, Council Decision of 22 July 2003.

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This requirement has provided an impetus to the integration of equal opportunities issues in the employment framework. At the 2000 Lisbon summit, a specific target for the female employment rate of 60% by 2010 was included.

The European Commission presents an annual report on progress including recommendations for mainstreaming the gender dimension in the various policies (most recent issues: European Commission, 2004, 2005a). The reports generally focus on measuring progress in the reduction of the gender gap in educational enrolment, pay, employment rates, unemployment, sex segregation in the labour market and participation in decision-making (see annexes to the reports). However, in the 2005 report, the monitoring of gender mainstreaming is limited to immigration and integration policies, which are not of direct relevance to the present study. The statistics in the reports are not subjected to further analysis and do not result in practical recommendations or identify good practices with a high potential for replication. The recommendations are formulated in a rather general way; they insist on the necessary enduring commitment by Member States, Commission and Council to a series of tasks:

- providing coherent and comparable sex-disaggregated data in all relevant policy fields;
- further developing gender equality indicators to enable assessing progress⁸;
- tackling gender-based segregation in a concrete and comprehensive way (not further specified);
- revising job classification systems and making job evaluation systems transparent;
- applying active labour market policies to bring women back into the workforce after extended periods of parental leave;
- removing the obstacles faced by women trying to reach higher and managerial positions;

- promote a gender-balanced participation of scientists, engineers and technicians.
- (European Commission, 2004, p. 8).

The EC's Expert Group on Gender and Employment (EGGE) has conducted a gender impact assessment of European employment policy and the EES (Rubery, 2002). The Group argues that the practical definition and impact of gender mainstreaming are strongly shaped by the general EU objectives of a competitive economy (see also Pollack and Hafner-Burton, 2000), and have focused on supply-side measures without changing employers' attitudes (and even less adopting a more holistic approach to employment and social and welfare policy). The impact is greatest in the areas which are most consistent with the main aims and objectives of the EES: improving access for women to active labour market policies (for instance through targets or minimum quotas for the underrepresented sex), lifelong learning programmes, facilitating access to the labour market through the promotion of gender-neutral tax policies, the development of schemes to assist women entrepreneurs, and the expansion of childcare provisions. Even in these areas the development of policies has been patchy (Rubery, 2002). Actions to desegregate labour markets mainly consist of diversifying training programmes for unemployed women or women returning to employment, programmes to influence the initial choice of education, training and career, positive action programmes, and some limited incentives for employers to diversify occupations. However, there are few initiatives to reduce vertical segregation and no gender dimension is included in the measures to deal with skill shortages: women are not considered as a possible source of supply to key job shortage areas such as IT, and skill shortage in female-dominated areas such as teaching and nursing is not mentioned. Moreover, the EES is subject to the 'open method of coordination', which implies that member states ultimately define how they will implement the strategy and many different national outcomes are compatible

⁸ Every Presidency since that of France in 2000 has proposed a specific action in this field, but the only set of indicators in the fields of employment and education to date is equal pay.

with the EES and the gender mainstreaming 'pillar'. EGGE's reports show the divergent institutional embedding of gender mainstreaming in the Member States and the different timescales and measures applied. Gender mainstreaming measures in the framework of the EES do not deal with more general questions such as whether equality in the labour market means job equality or income equality, or how to change the behaviour of men and the gendered division of non-waged work. Even less attention is paid to the question of transforming underlying economic and social structures (Rubery, 2002).

Similar conclusions can be found in Mosesdottir and Erlingsdottir (2005), who recently assessed the quality of gender mainstreaming in the EES for the period 1997–2002. They conclude that the countries in their study (Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Spain, Austria, the Netherlands and Iceland) rely more on special action and measures based on the principle of equal treatment and the women's perspective than on gender mainstreaming. Moreover, they find that a lack of cooperation between social actors, bureaucrats, experts on gender equality and political actors hampers the implementation of gender mainstreaming, which requires the involvement of all these actors. They argue that there is a lack of attention to the interests of different women. They point out that the lack of a clear definition of gender equality or a clear identification of the desirable outcomes of efforts to promote equal opportunities is one of the reasons why it is difficult to measure the results of the EES. Targets are set to support the objectives of the EES, but they do not address the gender pay gap or gender segregation, the most urgent gender-related problems affecting

employment in the Nordic countries. All in all, Mosesdottir and Erlingsdottir conclude that the EES has had limited empowering effect.

A recent evaluation report of European Community support to private-sector development (PSD) in third countries (ADE, 2005) is also negative in its assessment of how gender is used as a crosscutting issue in practice. Four cross-cutting issues are analysed: gender, environment, social issues such as working conditions or child labour, and good governance. Although most country programming documents explicitly mention cross-cutting issues, they do not give directions for the systematic integration of these issues into the cooperation strategy and in particular into the PSD strategy. Further, they seldom provide monitoring indicators and baseline information. In addition, the evaluators did not find evidence of any systematic attempt at concretely integrating cross-cutting issues into EC PSD interventions.

Progress and challenges at the EU level

Gender mainstreaming in employment and education is subject to two major constraints: first, the dominant position of the member states and the absence of a strong committed agenda-setter, leading to a picture of quite uneven implementation and impact of gender mainstreaming; second, the dominance of general EU objectives, which reduces the potential impact of gender mainstreaming to measures improving the EU as a competitive knowledge-based society. The use of indicators as a tool is not fully developed yet, and their development and use calls for improvement.